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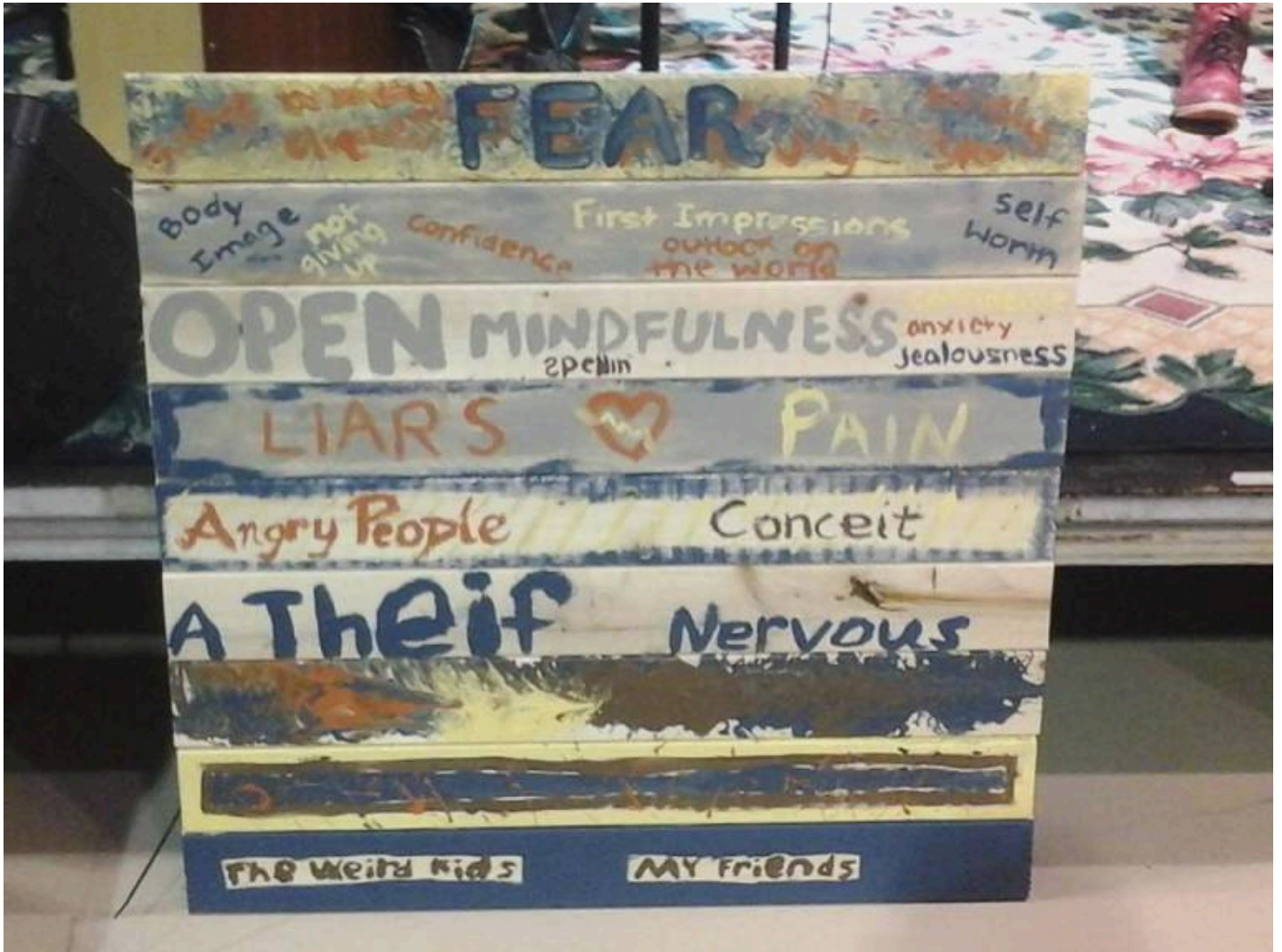
Youth Gather at January's Winter Youth Retreat



By Lacey Brown

January 17-20th was the annual Winter Youth Retreat at the UCC's Conference Center in Blowing Rock, North Carolina. Over 100 students attended from both the South East Conference and the Southern Conference. Both middle and high school students and their leaders gathered for three packed days of fun activities, worship, skiing, and fellowship. The theme of the weekend was "commitment," which

prompted us to ask how we commit ourselves to seeing the face of Christ in one another. Using Matthew 25:31-46, students reflected on the barriers that keep them from seeing Christ in each other. They considered the question: What are the things we all experience that create walls and prevent loving relationships with one another? During the final worship service, each student painted a 2x4 wooden board with words that illustrated those things that prevent them from seeing God in others. They courageously shared things like money, low self-esteem, fear, judgment, and social status.



Once the paint had dried, each church nailed their boards together to create small portions of a wall. As the communion table was being prepared, students laid the boards down and created a path toward the table. It was a beautiful act of worship when the walls portraying each student's deepest fear and most uncomfortable places soon become a bridge of hope and love that ushered them towards the table and into a deeper relationship with the divine.

"That they may all be one," captured the ethos of the weekend. Even though each representing church had their own worship style and their own culture, there was a unifying sense of excitement and support

amongst everyone there. There are so many passionate people within the United Church of Christ who are doing amazing ministry and are looking toward the future with a hopeful determination. As a denomination, events such as the Winter Youth Retreat strengthen our churches and sustain community. Even more so, they offer hope and community to youth who desperately yearn for authenticity in communion with God and each other. As we move forward, let us sustain the energy and financial support within the denomination to keep youth events going for years to come. These trips help shape the next generation into responsible, faithful Christians who are passionate about seeing Jesus Christ in the world around them.

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